

GENIUS IS ONLY A GREAT STORAGE
BATTERY OF JOYOUSNESS

GENIUS A MYSTERY



NEVER saw a genius, and really do not know what a genius is, but surely there is plenty of precedent for speaking upon themes concerning which we know nothing. But my idea is that a genius is a man who has the faculty of doing certain excellent things in a masterly way. What other men work out with sweat and lamp-smoke this man does jauntily, joyously, and without seeming thought or effort. While others are talking about the thing, he does it. And he can never tell how or why. No dictionary can define this faculty of genius. No chemist can analyze it.

It seems to be a flash of the divine spark that goes straight to the heart of things. The man simply sees—that is all. And seeing he says, or writes, or paints, or acts.

And depend upon this: direct and forceful doing is always the result of direct and vivid seeing. When you write luminously, without fog or mist, it is because there is no fog in your brain. Before you can make others see the picture you must first see it yourself.

¶ All of those explanations about genius being "the ability to concentrate," and "the capacity for hard work," are clever but fallacious. You may have "the ability to concentrate" and "the capacity for hard work" and yet be mediocre. To be sure, the genius has the ability to concentrate, but he has something more. Some of us who have tuppance worth of talent can conserve it, and by judicious exercise and tutoring grow to a point where we do fairly good work. But where is the professor of literature who could have shown Shakespeare how to write "Hamlet," or the art school that could have instructed Michael Angelo how to fresco the Chapel of Sixtus, or the painter who could have mixed the colors for Turner's "Carthage," or the

pedagog who could have instructed Edison in physics?

Yet we know nothing is done by chance. The miraculous is but the natural not yet understood. There are laws that regulate this supreme flash of the intellect. But all we know is that at long intervals we see its manifestation. Genius seems to be a sample of God's power, sent just to show us the possible. If one man out of a million may be supremely wise and efficient for a little while, why may he not in time be wise and efficient all the time? And what one man may attain, why may not the race attain? Emerson says, "A man is a god in ruins." This seems to imply that man is a failure, but the real fact is, Emerson, in this instance, has reversed the truth. A man is a god in the chrysalis.

Now the genius is only a genius a part of the time. His moments of insight are transient, and there may be days or weeks or months that are fallow. Then comes a quick gathering up of forces and a glory stands

revealed for which the man had been groping for years.

Corot, catching the sunlight on his palette and transferring it to canvas, was once so surprised and gladdened that he burst into song, and shouted for joy. And wishing to share this joy with another he looked about, and saw a peasant trudging along the road. Corot ran to him, embraced the astonished man, and seizing him by the arm, ran him across the meadow, and standing him before the canvas, said, "Look at that! Look at that! I've got it at last—look at that!"

¶ The peasant didn't see it—he hadn't been looking for it—and the sunlight not being in his soul, he could not perceive it when it was mirrored in a picture.

No, the peasant didn't see it, but he saw a "wild look" in Corot's eyes, and making haste to disengage himself, went home and told his wife that the painter-man was crazy. But Corot wasn't crazy. He was as sane to the last as Walt Whitman.

The fact that one man sees things the

average man cannot, and knows things the average man does not, is no proof of insanity—hardly, brother!

Corot was not crazy—he merely seemed crazy ❀ ❀

“This man hath a devil and is mad”—but he was not, that was only the opinion of certain good people.

Men of supreme intellect do not go insane—it is lack of intellect that makes most of the trouble. And so the opposite of things always seems alike ❀ When Shakespeare said, “Great genius is to madness near allied,” he knew better ❀ He was just passing out a popular fallacy to tickle the ears of the groundlings.

But this little extension of mental power which we call genius, has ever gotten its owner into trouble ❀ People cannot comprehend it, and so they resent it. It is an insult—the man does not conform—he goes his own gait—he forgets the things that to others are vital: cards, curds and custards are nothing to him. He sees God in the

burning bush and wants to ask Him a question ❀ ❀

Read the history of Beethoven, Michael Angelo, Leonardo, Shakespeare, Shelley, Byron, and you read a tale of family and domestic woe.

The genius is a sore trial. Even Jesus was not exempt. His mother and brethren saw the extravagance of his acts, and wished to take him back in safety to their country home. And he, wearied with their importunities, once for a moment lost his poise, and with a touch of impatience said to his mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee!"

Should a genius marry, let him follow the example of Goethe, who used to refer to his wife as "a convenient loaf of brown bread." Of course, the ideal would be to find a woman whose mind matches his own—who knows his worth and sympathizes with his ideals—and here our memory runs straight to the Brownings.

But the chances are that the genius neither

takes to himself the loaf of brown bread nor does he find his Elizabeth Barrett ❀ And being a genius only at intervals, and the rest of the time an average man, he marries an average woman.

Opinions, as usual, are divided as to whether the man is a genius or a fool. His kinsmen, who have known him from childhood, say he is a fool or a rogue—his conduct to them is always an affront ❀ The wife wishes to keep on good terms with her kinsmen and with society, and still she wishes to be loyal to her husband. She wishes to help him—to be his inspiration.

The pace is too rapid—the woman grows breathless from running, and seeks to hold the man back. He tries to carry her, but finds he cannot. She wishes to minister to his “higher nature,” but how can she when he seems to want nothing but to be let alone! ❀ Her dissatisfaction is with herself, but this she does not know. We lay blame elsewhere, and take all credit to ourselves. The great outside world of men and women

does not know the man excepting by his work. They see his picture, his statue, his book, or they listen to his oration, his song, or watch his performance from the parquet. He gives to the public his best, and the public breaks into applause. They demand his autograph, his photograph, they want the honor of shaking hands with him. His wife is pointed out as a mere appendage—nobody cares for her!

Ah! she will show them! Straightway she sets out to be clever, too. She seeks to rival her liege and turn the current of admiration her way. She writes a book, or prepares a “paper,” or sings in public, or “recites,” or displays her beauty in unique, peculiar and splendid gowns.

But alas! letters still come demanding her husband’s autograph, women stare at her coldly—it is all for him! She is powerless against his genius, and so is he.

Chills of fear and fevers of heat chase each other across the soul. The public does not know her husband! It sees only the one

side. She knows him—yes, I guess so. He deceives the public into the belief that he is some great one. The words of unkind criticism and vituperation that she occasionally sees in the newspapers please her. The kinsmen are right—the man is a fakir, a fraud, a pretender—she knows—I guess so! He no longer loves her—he goes to the woods alone. He does not tell her his plans. He declines to go to receptions or fetes—he writes or works half the night.

She now demands attention as her due—asserts her rights, and boldly affronts the autograph fiends and bids the fools who come on pious pilgrimages, begone.

She mistakes her husband's abstraction for stupidity, and seeks to rail him into a better way of life. She chides, rebukes, and he—awakening out of his lethargy—proves his common clay by railing back.

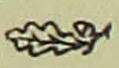
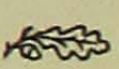
Alas! It confirms her suspicions—he is only clay and common clay at that.

When a man ceases to pay court to his wife, other men are apt to. Her callers are smart

in attire, quick in repartee, clever, attentive. They are like the suitors in the house of Ulysses—they overrun the place.

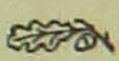
But not eternally—for one fine day a tenor being too smart, laboring under the popular illusion that the genius is a fool, finds himself kicked into the street, and a clarionet (through error) tossed after him.

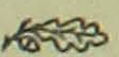
There are feminine tears, threats, protests in contralto—and now surely the man is no genius: he is simply a plain brute: a wife-beater—or nearly so.

She is losing her husband—he is no longer wholly hers—he is slipping away, away. Their house is no longer a home—it is only an office or a studio! She begins a system of espionage—letters are opened—duplicate keys play their part—servants are taken into her confidence  And her punishment consists in finding her suspicions true  We find that for which we seek. “That which I feared has come upon me.” The thing we fear we bring to pass.

And now the heart that should be filled

with tenderness and gentle mother-love becomes an abyss of cruelty and revenge. She is willing, aye, anxious to disgrace, destroy and damn to lowest hell that which she once worshipped as divine.

“The man is to blame,” you say. And you are right  His offense lies in his power, against which he is powerless. If he had not the power to express, to do, to influence, to mold, to attract, he would never have given offense to this woman or any one else  He is to blame; but yet he is blameless because he is what he is. And she is blameless for the same reason.

The artist is always selfish—he sacrifices everybody and everything in order to get the work done. Cellini casting his “Perseus” and throwing into the molten mass all of the family plate in order to get the statue complete, reveals the man. Palissy burning up the furniture in order to bring the furnace to the proper degree of heat, is the true type  And here is my advice to all women who are married to men who love

their work better than they love their wives:
 ❧ Do not nag, do not struggle, do not obstruct, do not fight, do not rival—just be yourself ❧ You are only lovable when you are yourself. Be a nobody, and sink yourself in your work, just as your husband sinks himself in his ❧ If your husband is great, he is great on account of his work—that is his virtue. He knows this, and his admiration is for the person who does his work. ❧ And in useful work, at the last, there is no degree. It is all necessary, and the woman told of by Theodore Parker, who swept the room to the glory of God, deserves and shall have her crown of reward.

Just here I feel like apologizing for having referred to a woman—any woman—as “a convenient loaf of brown bread.” It was Goethe’s expression, and not mine. I have too much respect for womanhood to speak lightly of women. The best that is in my soul has been absorbed from women. So I would rather put a new construction on Goethe’s simile and say there is nothing

more nutritious, nothing more useful, and nothing so satisfying as brown bread. If you are a loaf of brown bread, thank God; but do not pretend you are a frosted cake, or a plum pudding. You will surely disappoint somebody, and there will be for you a day of reckoning.

The clerk at the ribbon counter may be won by frosted cake with frills, sprinkled with red sanded sugar and caraway seed, but not so the man of power ♣ He wants brown bread.

And at the last the woman who can sink her oriental instincts, and be willing to be a nobody, simply do her work and sweep her room to the glory of God, completes the circle and reveals the great and splendid personality ♣ By giving all, she shall win all. Simple honesty, simple integrity—no secrets, no conniving, no schemes!

And from my limited experience in these matters I gather that the plain and unpretentious woman often has a splendid mind, and a deal of sturdy commonsense, and is

very much more likely to appreciate her husband's genius, and make allowance for his limitations, than a wife who runs rival to her lord and has a furtive eye on fame for herself ✿ Be a woman, a plain honest woman—the mother of men—and the man of power will go to you and lay his tired head in your lap, and with tears of gratitude, bless the Giver of all Good that you are his, that you minister to him, cheer him on his way, nourish and refresh him.

Maeterlinck in writing of the bees asks, “Why do they thus renounce sleep, the delights of honey and love, and exquisite leisure enjoyed, for instance, by their winged brothers, the butterfly? Two or three flowers suffice for their nourishment, yet in an hour they will visit two hundred in order to collect a treasure which they will never taste. Why all this toil and distress, and whence this mighty assurance that all is well? Is it so certain then that the new generation whereunto you offer your lives will merit the sacrifice; will be

made more beautiful, happier, will do something you have not done because you have thus toiled?"

And the bees do not answer. Neither does the genius know why he thus works, and dares, and does, and offers himself and his all for a good that is yet unguessed.

He does not know—he lives by faith. And of the Power that guides his footsteps and leads him on, he knows nothing more than does the bee. Continually he hears the Voice, "Arise and get thee hence, for this is not thy rest." And through snow and ice, through dust and heat, through glaring day and darkest night his answer to the Voice is ever instant and implicit obedience. The spirit of abnegation that gives all, and thereby wins all, is upon him: "Lord, here am I!" ¶ And this abnegation—this obedience that neither stands, nor sits, nor hesitates, but goes, is the price of achievement.

